STATUS IN RELATIONSHIPS – Act 2 sc 2

Hermia (Sinead Keenan) and Lysander (Trystan Gravelle) in the forest. (2005 RSC production)

Gregory Doran was very interested in exploring the power base of relationships in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. He felt the play was very much about the use and abuse of power in relationships and he began the early rehearsal process with a lot of work based around status. The exercises which follow illustrate some of this work.

WARM UP – Eye contact

As players to walk around the space making eye contact with each other in the following ways. If players are born between January and June they will hold and maintain eye contact with other people in the group. If players are born between July and December, they will make an initial moment of eye contact with other people and then look away. After a couple of minutes, swap over.
Discuss with the players the different sense of self and status that is created simply by changing eye contact in this simple way.

WARM UP – Status numbers

Introduce players to a status vocabulary using numbers; number 1 equals lowest status and number 10 equals highest. Ask the students to find a physicality for both of these extremes. For example, if you are playing status number 10 players will take up a lot of space in the room and maintain eye contact with people. If you are playing status number 1, players will reduce the amount of physical space they occupy and tend to look away from others.

Distribute playing cards to players giving each a number between 1 and 10. Be careful not to allow other players to see which numbers you are distributing. Ask them to move around the space as that number – how would they move physically? Now ask them to introduce themselves to other people in the group as this status number, asking them to make any vocal adjustments.

Ask players to make a status line up without telling each other what number they are. They can say hello to each other in order to assess whether they are the same status as another player, or higher or lower.

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APPLYING STATUS WORK TO A SCENE

As a group, read the edited scene between Hermia and Lysander (see next page). Read the scene around the group, each person reading punctuation mark to punctuation mark and stopping at regular intervals to agree on meaning.

Ask the players to perform the scene in pairs exploring different status levels. First, ask them to play Hermia as a high status 10 and Lysander as a lower status 2. Now reverse these numbers and play the scene again. What changes happen and what feels right?

Now ask the players to decide on an appropriate and/or interesting status relationship number to apply to the characters in the scene. Allow them working time to rehearse their scene and watch some examples.

Discuss with the group what these different readings of the scene have brought out for them. How realistic would they be if they were performed on a stage? Could they work in production?

Ask the group to watch the RSC version of this scene on the *Exploring Shakespeare* website. What status levels do they think the actors are playing in the scene?

OTHER WAYS OF APPLYING STATUS WORK TO A SCENE

Frozen to the floor: In pairs, players cast themselves as either Hermia or Lysander. They play the scene through twice; during the first run through, Hermia is given the instruction that she cannot move from the spot she is standing on, but Lysander is given free licence to move wherever he wants. The second time the scene is played, Lysander is told he cannot move and Hermia has free licence to move wherever she chooses. Discuss with the players what impact this had on the status relationship between the two characters. Which way of playing it felt appropriate for the scene?

Status ladder: Numbers one to ten are placed in a line along the floor. Two players are cast as Hermia and Lysander and two more players stand behind them as their partners. The partners will place the two actors on an appropriate status number to start the scene from. As they start speaking, their partner will move them up and down the status ladder. As they move, they must change their manner and way of relating to the other character to correspond to the number they have been placed at by their partner.

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EXPLORING SHAKESPEARE:
A Midsummer Night's Dream

Act 2 sc 2 - Edited scene

Lysander And to speak truth, I have forgot our way.
We'll rest us, Hermia, if you think it good,
And tarry for the comfort of the day.

Hermia Be it so, Lysander. Find you out a bed;
For I upon this bank will rest my head.

Lysander One turf shall serve as pillow for us both;
One heart, one bed; two bosoms, and one troth.

Hermia Nay, good Lysander; for my sake, my dear,
Lie further off yet; do not lie so near.

Lysander O, take the sense, sweet, of my innocence!
Love takes the meaning in love's conference –
I mean that my heart unto yours is knit,
So that but one heart we can make of it.
Two bosoms interchained with an oath;
So, then, two bosoms and a single troth.
Then by your side no bed-room me deny;
For lying so, Hermia, I do not lie.

Hermia Lysander riddles very prettily.
Now much beshrew my manner and my pride
If Hermia meant to say Lysander lied.
But, gentle friend, for love and courtesy,
Lie further off, in humane modesty.
Such separation as may well be said
Becomes a virtuous bachelor and a maid,
So far be distant; and good night, sweet friend.
Thy love ne'er alter till thy sweet life end.

Lysander Amen, amen, to that fair prayer say I;
And then end life when I end loyalty.
Here is my bed; sleep give thee all his rest.

Hermia With half that wish the wisher's eyes be pressed.